

**CITY OF SAN DIEGO
M E M O R A N D U M**

DATE: September 3, 2003

TO: Balboa Park Committee

FROM: Marcela Escobar-Eck, Development Services Department

SUBJECT: Park Boulevard Promenade Project No. 2147

SUMMARY

Issue - Should the Balboa Park Committee recommend approval of proposed amendments to the Balboa Park Master Plan (BPMP), Central Mesa Precise Plan (CMPP), and the Progress Guide and General Plan (PGGP) as part the Park Boulevard Promenade project proposed by the Zoological Society of San Diego?

Staff Recommendation - Approve the proposed BPMP, CMPP and PGGP amendments with the provisions outlined in the Discussion section as the City Manager's Required Provisions.

Other Recommendations - None at this time.

Fiscal Impact - None with this action. Public and/private financing considerations required for project implementation are not a part of the proposal at this time. Actions related to financing options, as well a required lease negotiations, will require a subsequent action before City Council.

Water and Energy Conservation Status - The proposed plan is consistent with all water and energy conservation guidelines contained in Council Policy 200-14.

Environmental Status - The City of San Diego, as lead agency under CEQA, has prepared an Environmental Impact Report. It is anticipated that the document will be finalised in September 2003.

BACKGROUND

Zoo Project History

In April 1999, the Zoo submitted an application for a proposed expansion project to the City of San Diego. At that time, the project included but was not limited to a new parking lot adjacent to the Zoo, demolition of the War Memorial Building and expansion into an area currently used for the Archery Range.

In June 1999, the project was initiated by Planning Commission. However, in response to public testimony at this meeting and a subsequent public workshop held in September 1999, the Zoo elected to put the project on hold in order to work with various interest groups and to allow more direct public input into the process.

In February 2000, the City of San Diego formed the “Working Group”, a 40 member citizens group consisting of representatives from various organizations. The stated purpose of the Working Group was to “develop options which integrate the needs and interests of the Zoo, other Balboa Park Institutions, users and neighbors and the San Diego Community at large.” The Working Group held a series of year-long public meetings and their work concluded with the preparation of a report entitled “The Final Working Group Report” dated December 2000.

In October 2001, staff began its review of the revised project. The project no longer proposes the demolition of the War Memorial Building nor inclusion of the Archery Range. A specific project description is contained in the Discussion section of this report. The proposal still requires amendments to the Balboa Park Master Plan and the Central Mesa Precise Plan, but now includes a Site Development Permit in accordance with Land Development Code Section 143.0210, Environmentally Sensitive Lands regulations for potential impacts to Historic Resources. Specifically, the development would modify the local historic landmark boundary as changes to the Zoo Entry, Carousel and Miniature Train are proposed.

Natural Resources and Culture Committee and Planning Commission Meetings

In October 2001, staff presented the project to the Natural Resources and Culture Committee (NR&C) in order to seek policy guidance on the Zoo’s proposal, specifically within the areas related to Land Use, Parking, Circulation and Historic Resources. In January 2002, staff presented the project to a joint meeting of the NR&C and the Planning Commission. The purpose of this meeting was to provide a status update of the proposal. The action agendas from those meetings and staff response to those items are contained in Attachment 1.

Revised Project Submitted

In October 2002, the Zoo submitted Plan Amendments to the Balboa Park Master Plan (BPMP) and the Central Mesa Precise Plan (CMPP) to implement modifications to their leasehold. Notable components of the revised master plan and precise plan include the following:

- A. A four-level, below grade parking structure located in the approximate location of the existing parking lot and continuing south to the Bea Levenson Fountain.
- B. A new Zoo entry.
- C. A landscaped pedestrian promenade along Park Boulevard.
- D. New Zoo exhibit space adjacent to Park Boulevard.
- E. New employee parking on a parcel off of Richmond Street.

- F. Modifications to the local historic boundary and the Historic Landmark Zone, specifically, relocation of the existing Zoo entry, and relocation of the Carousel and Miniature Train.

A more specific project description is contained in Attachment 2, an excerpt from the Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

Planning Commission Meeting

On July 10th, 2003, the plan was presented to the Planning Commission as in information item only in the form of a public field trip and workshop to provide an overview of the specific project areas and to allow for discussion of the proposal. During that meeting, the Commission gave direction and requested additional information in some areas. Those issues included but were not limited to the following:

Provide information on the economic impact of the project benefits
Discuss transit analysis as it relates to the proposal
Discuss the proposed pedestrian bridge and Village Place cul-de-sac alternatives
Provide clarification of existing/proposed lease areas

A follow up workshop with the Planning is tentatively scheduled for October 2, 2003.

Community Outreach

During the Planning Commission Initiation hearing and subsequent Natural Resources and Culture Committee meetings with the Planning Commission, a wide variety of issues were raised associated with the project. One primary issue included the need to take extraordinary efforts to involve the public in the Zoo's proposal. The Zoo has initiated numerous contacts with various community groups, committees and Balboa Park institutions and museums. A list of their outreach efforts is contained in Attachment 3. City staff have also undergone efforts early in the process to keep the citizens informed of the Zoo's proposal. These include the formation of the Working Group described above, created to represent a wide array of interested parties. A City web site has been created for the proposal in order to provide updated information to the public at project milestones. Information on the proposal such as the Land Use Documents (BPMP and the CMPP), project site plan, and periodic overviews are forwarded to the City's 15 Community Service Centers and maintained for local citizens to access. The web site and Community Service Center information will continue to be updated throughout the processing of the project. Additionally, two Environmental Impact Report Preparation meetings were conducted to ensure that any interested members of the public had the opportunity to comment on the scope of the EIR.

DISCUSSION

The proposed action before the committee today is a recommendation on the proposed plan amendments to both the BPMP and the CMPP. Copies of the draft amendments were distributed to the Committee on July 29, 2003. As discussed above, the project includes a Site Development Permit (SDP) for environmentally sensitive lands, specifically, for potential impacts to historic resources. If ultimately approved by City Council, future review of the design construction

drawings would be required by the Park and Recreation Department and appropriate Park and Recreation Department and Historic Resources Board committees to ensure consistency with the amended plans. These plans incorporate design guidelines as well as mitigation measures of the Environmental Impact Report.

City Manager's Provisions regarding Project Processing

Recognizing the fact that the City is also undergoing work on the Balboa Park Parking, Circulation and Land Use Study ("Study") and has retained a team of consultants to assist in this effort, the City Manager's Office, in consultation with the Mayor's Office and Councilmember Atkins, evaluated the issues related to the processing of both projects. Also, acknowledging the fact that the City Manager does not have the independent discretion to simply stop processing a project application, the City Manager has directed staff to continue processing the Zoological Society's proposal provided that the Zoological Society agrees to certain provisions.

As outlined in the attached correspondence from Deputy City Manager Bruce Herring dated March 17th and March 26th, the Zoological Society agreed to the following provision which will become conditions of project approval (Attachment 4).

Parking Study Coordination -The Society agrees to working closely with all of the Balboa Park institutions, City staff and interested members of the public on the Study. The Society recognizes that approval of their proposed project in no way forecloses any of the opportunities or recommendations that result from the upcoming Study. The Society also acknowledges that they are incurring a certain risk by proceeding with the project before the Study is complete. The risk is that if alternative parking solutions result from the Study, sections of the Balboa Park Master Plan and the Central Mesa Precise Plan that pertain to the Park Boulevard Promenade Project would have to be amended again to reflect the outcome of the Study. In which case, the Park Boulevard Promenade Project as proposed and approved may have to be revised to reflect the recommendations of the Balboa Park Parking, Circulation and Land Use Study.

Public Financing Plan - The implementation of the Park Boulevard Promenade Project cannot be started until a financing plan is approved, which could take several years. By delaying discussions of public financing options until after the results of the Study are known enables the City to consider a wider range of park improvements which could include the ultimate implementation of the Park Boulevard Promenade Project.

Leasehold Boundaries/Lease Terms Amendments - Any discussions or negotiations on proposed changes to the Society's existing lease will not occur until after the ultimate financing plans are approved. Until such time, the Miniature Railroad lease will remain on holdover and no discussion or negotiations will occur with regard to the Society's leasehold boundaries or lease terms. However, the one exception to this provision would be if the Society decided to construct the Zoo Employee Parking Lot within their current leasehold in Sheep and Goat Canyon. The City would be willing to discuss any minor lease adjustments or other mechanisms needed with regard to constructing the employee parking lot at that time. The costs associated with constructing the employee parking lot in Sheep and Goat Canyon would be the Society's responsibility.

Private Project Processing - The Society will continue processing the proposed Park Boulevard Promenade Project as a “private” project which means that the project scope will not include consideration of public financing at this time. No new exhibit areas outside of the current leasehold boundaries, no discussions as to potential changes in the leasehold boundaries, and no parking improvements can be started until an ultimate financing plan is approved. Any issues related to the actual construction, operations, maintenance, and lease amendments will be addressed at the implementation stage, after a financing plan is approved.

CONCLUSION

Staff recommends that the Balboa Park Committee recommend approval of the proposed amendments to the Balboa Park Master Plan (BPMP), Central Mesa Precise Plan (CMPP), and the Progress Guide and General Plan (PGGP) as part the Park Boulevard Promenade project with the City Manager’s provisions outlined in this report.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Recommend approval of the proposed BPMP, CMPP and SDP with modifications.
2. Recommend denial of the proposed BPMP, CMPP and SDP.

Respectfully submitted,

Marcela Escobar-Eck
Deputy Director,
Project Management Division

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Attachments:

1. Natural Resources and Culture Committee Action Agendas (10/01 and 01/02) and Staff Response
2. Environmental Impact Report Excerpt of Project Description
3. Park Boulevard Promenade Community Outreach
4. March 17th and March 26th Letter from the City Manager’s Office